



Eric Anderson/Register-Pajaronian

Riders throw their hands in the air as the Giant Dipper's train begins its descent down the roller coaster's first dip.

Boardwalk Giant Dipper celebrates 85 years of thrills RP 6-11-09

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

It's been just more than 85 years since the Giant Dipper was unveiled at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, and the public keeps coming back for more.

On Saturday at 9 p.m., the Boardwalk will celebrate its most popular ride's 85th anniversary with a large fireworks spectacular on the beach in front of the amusement park. Admission is free and open to the public. For those who would like to celebrate while on the rides, the Giant Dipper and a few others will remain open during the festivities.

The wooden coaster was built in just 47 days in 1924. Its creator, Arthur Looff, used a basic design still used today — an electric motor operating a chain-pulley system with a huge leather-belted wheel — to pull the cars 70 feet up the ride's first hill. Once they reach the top, the rest is left up to gravity.

Giant Dipper facts

Debuted: May 17, 1924
Original fare: 15 cents
Number of days to build: 47
Construction cost: \$50,000
Length of track: One-half mile
Creator: Arthur Looff
Current fare: \$4.50 (6 tickets)
Minimum height to ride: at least 50 inches tall

Looff had experience building wooden coasters in the state before he tackled the Giant Dipper. His other designs, now long gone, included the Big Dipper in San Francisco at Chutes at the Beach Park — later called Playland at the Beach. That ride opened two years before the Giant Dipper's inception and closed 33 years later.

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During the design process, Looff said he envisioned a giant wooden roller coaster that had, in his words, "the thrill of a plunge down a mine shaft, a balloon ascent, a parachute jump, airplane acrobatics, a cyclone, a toboggan ride and a ship in a storm."

In June 1987, it along with the boardwalk's antique carousel (designed by Looff's father, Charles) became designated National Historic Landmarks. Twenty years later, American Coaster Enthusiasts awarded the oldie-but-goody a Roller Coaster Landmark plaque.

While the vintage coaster may not be the fastest, slickest or tallest, it is arguably one of California's most beloved coasters and has bragging rights as the Golden State's oldest. If that isn't enough, the National Amusement Park Historical Association lists it as the fifth oldest coaster in continuous operation in its origi-



Fireworks will be shot off over the Giant Dipper Saturday night in celebration of the roller coaster's 85th birthday. Courtesy of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

nal location in the United States, and ninth oldest in the world.

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The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is open daily during the summer and is located at 400 Beach St. in Santa Cruz.

Ride costs and other information are available by calling 423-5590 or visiting www.beachboardwalk.com.